CHRISTIANS ARE DISAPPEARING FROM THE MIDDLE EAST – AND THE WEST IS DOING NOTHING ABOUT IT

The Crisis of an Ancient Civilization

For nearly two millennia, Christianity has been an integral part of the Middle Eastern landscape. Long before the religion was adopted in Europe, ancient churches were established and flourished in cities such as Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch, Mosul, and Alexandria. These early communities, which originally spoke Aramaic and Greek, survived centuries of Roman persecution, Islamic conquests, and Ottoman rule.

However, these historic populations are currently disappearing at an alarming rate. The modern collapse of regional order, coupled with ideological hostility and a lack of Western engagement, has led to a catastrophic decline. When these Christians are forced to leave, the resulting cultural loss is permanent, and they rarely return to their ancestral lands.

The Demographic Collapse in Numbers

The statistical evidence of this decline is stark across several nations:

1. Iraq: A century ago, Christians accounted for 10 percent of the population. Today, they represent less than 2 percent, totaling fewer than 300,000 people.
2. Syria: Since 2011, the Christian population has decreased by more than half.
3. Lebanon: Once a rare Christian-majority state, Lebanon is seeing its Christian demographic eroded by continuous emigration and shifting demographic imbalances.
4. Regional Trends: At the start of World War I, Christians represented 20 percent of the Middle East's population. Today, that figure is estimated to be less than 3 percent, with a decline from 3.3 percent to 2.9 percent recorded between 2010 and 2020 alone.

The Strategic and Cultural Importance of Christian Communities

The disappearance of Middle Eastern Christians is not merely a matter of religious solidarity; it is a significant strategic concern. Historically, these communities have played an outsized role in medicine, education, diplomacy, and commerce. They have traditionally served as cultural bridges between the East and the West, and between Islamic traditions and secular modernity.

The exit of these populations accelerates sectarian polarization. As pluralism weakens, societies often harden into binary identities, such as Sunni versus Shia or Islamist versus authoritarian. Consequently, a Middle East without a Christian presence becomes more fragile, more extreme, and less tolerant, losing a critical anchor of modern civic life.

Media Silence and Western Indifference

Despite the severity of this persecution, the plight of Middle Eastern Christians rarely dominates Western media or international political agendas. While churches are bombed and entire villages are emptied, the coverage remains minimal. This silence may stem from a sense of discomfort, as acknowledging the systematic targeting of Christians complicates existing narratives regarding colonialism and cultural relativism. Furthermore, it raises difficult questions concerning Islamist violence and the limitations of Western foreign policy. This lack of attention is increasingly viewed not as neutrality, but as acquiescence.

The Failure of Western Policy and Foreign Aid

While Western governments frequently affirm their commitment to religious freedom, there is a profound gap between this rhetoric and actual policy. Although the United States and the European Union produce annual reports on religious freedom, these findings rarely translate into binding conditions for trade, aid, or diplomatic engagement.

In Iraq, Western funding following the defeat of ISIS focused on general reconstruction rather than providing targeted assistance to destroyed Christian towns like Qaraqosh and Bartella. In Syria, Western sanctions intended to punish the government have made economic recovery nearly impossible, disproportionately affecting minority communities and accelerating emigration. Similarly, in Egypt, the West maintains military and economic cooperation despite persistent structural discrimination against Coptic Christians, such as restrictive church construction laws and uneven law enforcement.

The Absence of Strategic Protection

Western policy has largely treated the disappearance of these ancient communities as a humanitarian afterthought rather than a strategic failure. Currently, the West has not:

1. Established internationally monitored safe zones for vulnerable minorities.
2. Prioritized minority protection in post-conflict diplomatic statements.
3. Imposed targeted sanctions on the non-state actors who actively persecute Christians.

Instead of insisting on conditions that would allow these communities to remain in their homes, the West has largely accepted emigration as an inevitable outcome, offering asylum as a substitute for survival in place.

Conclusion

The disappearance of Christianity from the Middle East is not an inevitable historical necessity; it is the result of specific choices made by both regional actors and international leaders. Defending these communities is a matter of upholding the basic rights of ancient peoples to remain in their historical homelands. If this presence vanishes, it will be because the modern world decided it did not matter enough to intervene.